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SIPDIS

KINSHASA ALSO FOR CHARLES FORD AND PLEASE PASS EMBASSY
BRAZZAVILLE

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TAGS: PREL KDEM CF CG GB

SUBJECT: GABON WORRIED ABOUT UPCOMING CONGO (BRAZZAVILLE)
ELECTION

REF: LIBREVILLE 0246

Classified By: DCM Nathan Holt for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Gabon views the July 12 presidential election in the neighboring Republic of Congo (Brazzaville) with "great concern," according to Minister of Defense Ali Bongo Ondimba. Bongo said a significant number of Congolese have crossed the ROC/Gabon border in recent weeks, fearing a resurgence of political violence in ROC. Bongo said there is no doubt that ROC President Denis Sassou-Nguesso will win the election--fairly or otherwise--but Gabon has worries about the electoral aftermath. End Summary.

Outcome Not in Doubt

¶2. (C) There is no doubt that ROC President Sassou-Nguesso will win the upcoming July 12 election, Gabonese Defense Minister Ali Bongo Ondimba told the Ambassador. "They are very determined," Bongo said of the Congolese president and his allies. Ali Bongo, the son and potential successor to ailing Gabonese President El Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba, met the Ambassador at his home May 30 for a wide-ranging discussion of Gabonese and regional issues (septels).

¶3. (C) Nevertheless, Bongo said, Sassou-Nguesso faces a formidable "northern" ethnic alliance and "mathematically, he could have a problem." Bongo and his family are ethnic Bateke, one of ROC's larger ethnic groups. "The leader" of the northern alliance has been in Gabon recently for senior level consultations, Bongo said. Although he named neither the leader nor the alliance, we assume that Bongo was referring to Mathias Dzon, an ethnic Teke and leader of the opposition Alliance for the Republic and Democracy (ARD).

¶4. (C/NF) Separately, the head of a Gabonese military intelligence service told the DCM that Gabon sees Sassou-Nguesso as intransigent and inflexible with his political opponents. "He does not know how to share," Col. Abel Oyiba commented, "and that will lead to trouble." Oyiba said he had met recently with ROC opposition leaders, whom he did not name. The defense minister added that "the problems will come after" the election, perhaps in two or three years, if Sassou-Nguesso does not change his governing style.

Border Crossing?

¶5. (C) "About three months ago" Gabon began to receive reports of ROC citizens crossing the border to wait out the

electoral period with friends and family members in Gabon, Bongo explained. Bongo did not estimate the number of people involved. Col. Oyiba said he would travel personally to the border region within the next two weeks to assess the situation.

Strained Relations

¶6. (C) Bongo also admitted that relations between the two countries are currently strained, at least at senior levels, because of hard feelings over the death and funeral arrangements for Gabonese First Lady Edith Lucie Bongo Ondimba (reftel). Edith Bongo, the wife of President Bongo and the daughter of President Sassou-Nguesso, died in Morocco March 14 after a long illness. She was buried in Congo (Brazzaville) at the insistence of Sassou-Nguesso and his family, to the dismay of President Bongo.

Comment

¶7. (C) Gabon's ties to Congo (Brazzaville) are deep, and those of the ruling Bongo family even deeper. It is difficult for us to judge the validity of the defense minister's concerns about the upcoming ROC elections. It is nevertheless interesting to note how closely this is being tracked in Libreville, and that the level of concern here is rising. End Comment.

REDDICK